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Résumé de l'article

Le célèbre «Essai sur les variations saisonnières des sociétés Eskimos» de Marcel Mauss est traditionnellement compris comme un texte sur la prééminence du monde social dans le fait de déterminer et d'imposer une organisation saisonnière au monde physique. De telles interprétations de la saisonnalité ne parviennent pas d'ordinaire à prendre correctement en compte les débats actuels sur la terre et sur la société dans l'Europe et l'Amérique du Nord contemporaines. En examinant attentivement le contexte historique de l'essai, on découvre la forte possibilité d'une lecture alternative: qu'il ait été rédigé dans un but polémique à l'encontre de la théorie anthropogéographique de l'école de Friedrich Ratzel. La cible première était Hans-Peder Steensby, disciple de Ratzel. En décrivant Steensby comme n'étant préoccupé exclusivement que de géographie physique, Mauss a réinterprété les données de celui-ci à l'intérieur de ses propres données contextuelles de morphologie sociale. Il en a conclu que le principe crucial qui gouvernait la vie saisonnière des Inuit était la symbiose entre le monde social et le monde physique, et non pas la détermination physique ou les adaptations technologiques identifiées par les anthropogéographes. Le fait de comprendre que Mauss cherchait à distancier sa propre sociologie/anthropologie de la géographie nous donne la possibilité de réfléchir à la divergence dans l'orientation théorique et le choix des questions de recherche dans la communauté des chercheurs en études inuit.

Against determinism: A reassessment of Marcel Mauss's essay on seasonal variations

Michael T. Bravo*

Résumé: Contre le déterminisme: Une réévaluation de l'essai de Marcel Mauss sur les variations saisonnières

Le célèbre «Essai sur les variations saisonnières des sociétés Eskimos» de Marcel Mauss est traditionnellement compris comme un texte sur la prééminence du monde social dans le fait de déterminer et d'imposer une organisation saisonnière au monde physique. De telles interprétations de la saisonnalité ne parviennent pas d'ordinaire à prendre correctement en compte les débats actuels sur la terre et sur la société dans l'Europe et l'Amérique du Nord contemporaines. En examinant attentivement le contexte historique de l'essai, on découvre la forte possibilité d'une lecture alternative: qu'il ait été rédigé dans un but polémique à l'encontre de la théorie anthropogéographique de l'école de Friedrich Ratzel. La cible première était Hans-Peder Steensby, disciple de Ratzel. En décrivant Steensby comme n'étant préoccupé exclusivement que de géographie physique, Mauss a réinterprété les données de celui-ci à l'intérieur de ses propres données contextuelles de morphologie sociale. Il en a conclu que le principe crucial qui gouvernait la vie saisonnière des Inuit était la symbiose entre le monde social et le monde physique, et non pas la détermination physique ou les adaptations technologiques identifiées par les anthropogéographes. Le fait de comprendre que Mauss cherchait à distancier sa propre sociologie/anthropologie de la géographie nous donne la possibilité de réfléchir à la divergence dans l'orientation théorique et le choix des questions de recherche dans la communauté des chercheurs en études inuit.

Abstract: Against Determinism: A reassessment of Marcel Mauss's essay on seasonal variations

The famous "Seasonal Variations of the Eskimo" by Marcel Mauss has traditionally been understood as a text about the dominance of the social world in determining and imposing seasonal organisation on the physical world. Such interpretations of seasonality typically fail to take adequate account of contemporary European and North American debates about land and society. Paying close attention to the historical context of the essay reveals strong evidence for an alternative reading: that it was written as a polemic against anthropogeographical theory from the school of Friedrich Ratzel. The prime target was Hans-Peder Steensby, an intellectual disciple of Ratzel. Depicting Steensby as exclusively concerned with physical geography, Mauss reinterpreted his evidence within his own evidential context of social morphology. He concludes that the crucial principle governing Inuit seasonal life is the *symbiosis* between the social and physical worlds—and not the physical determination or technological adaptations diagnosed by

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the anthropogeographers. Understanding that Mauss was seeking to distance his own sociology/anthropology from geography provides an opportunity to reflect on the divergence in theoretical orientation and choice of research problems amongst the community of Inuit studies.

Introduction

The intellectual legacy of Marcel Mauss has in recent years attracted sustained interest from historians of the social sciences (*e.g.*, Fournier 1994; James and Allen 1998; Schlanger 2006). Revisiting foundational texts about Inuit culture written during an epoch of heightened European intellectual and national rivalries, creates opportunities to understand our own intellectual agendas better, and to reflect on the trajectories of Inuit studies followed by scholars over the past century. For those of us with a debt to Mauss's work, we may hope to find a renewed appreciation of the premises and trajectories that often lie unexamined in present day research. Two of those trajectories—geography and anthropology—often co-exist uneasily in parallel worlds while trying to explain similar or overlapping phenomena. In each discipline the relationship between human and physical worlds usually proceeds from different starting points and is predicated on different kinds of explanation. Yet in both disciplines there is an explanatory tension between physical and social causes, which has been largely stabilised through the normative standards of the respective disciplines. In the interdisciplinary field of Inuit studies, human geographers attend more closely to work on navigation, spatiality, toponymy, and the physical landscape than anthropologists who tend to focus on questions of identity, religion, and kinship. In recognising Mauss's pioneering work in Inuit studies, this article revisits the debate about the intellectual territory of geography and anthropology, as well as the relationship between physical and social causation.

Broadly speaking, there are at least two essential components to any reassessment of a classic essay such as Mauss's (1906) "Seasonal Variations of the Eskimo" [hereafter abbreviated as SV with page references corresponding to the 1979 edition of James Fox's translation]. First the essay's resonance entails identifying and explaining the reception of the text, a task for which other reseachers (*e.g.*, Saladin d'Anglure 2004) are far better equipped than I am. However the recovery of the meanings within the essay demands a second form of enquiry, a renewed study of the evidential context, which can be defined as the assumptions, strategies, and deployment of evidence which enable an essay to speak to audiences around the time of its publication. In SV, it will be argued that the selection, ordering, and interpretation of evidence is central to understanding what was at stake. Mauss's early writings are normally situated in the context of the school of Durkheim and Mauss, characterised by the project to establish

a new school of sociology; *L'Année Sociologique*, the in-house journal, was their chief instrument in advancing a shared position.

My aim however is to move beyond the idea that SV was simply the product of a school of thought—and instead to demonstrate that it was a polemical intervention, an explicit attack on the school of Friedrich Ratzel and his "anthropogeographical" social theory.

The debate in historical context of the protagonists

The tensions between geographical, sociological, and anthropological schools of thought were an important part of the intellectual ferment of early 20th century social science disciplines. Rival schools of thought would in the ensuing decades continue to compete for the authority to make pronouncements about methods of analysis of human-land relations (Buttimer 1971; Claval 1998; Livingstone 1992; Mercier 1995; Müller 1996). Lucien Febvre (1922: 21-38), one of the founders of the French *Annales* school, set out to reconcile the different approaches of Ratzel's anthropogeography and Vidal de la Blache's human geography with the new school of Durkheim's sociology. He attributed the groups' clashes to the high intellectual stakes, but no less to their extraordinary ambition, confidence, and appetite for vigorous attacks (*ibid.*: 26). The sociologists, in Febvre's view, were "inclined towards reaction," not content to settle "for the vain pleasure of seeing unfold a good theoretical debate." Instead they redefined the debate on their own terms (*ibid.*). "In place of Ratzel's anthropogeography, they proposed to substitute a better defined science, and so they pretended, more rigorously demarcated [...] [called] 'social Morphology.' Their attitude dictated that we take sides" (*ibid*).[1] In this context, it is interesting that Febvre singled out SV as "an example, a demonstration—one might wish to say a manifesto" for the "study of social Morphology" (*ibid.*).

In taking a cue from Febvre, this paper examines Mauss's polemical tactics more closely. Specifically the polemic took aim at the deployment of anthropogeography in Inuit studies by one of Ratzel's followers, a young Danish geographer named Hans-Peder Steensby. The critique of Steensby (1905) by Mauss (1906) can be thought of as a duel between two lieutenants of the more experienced protagonists, a kind of war by proxy. In the wake of a humiliating defeat suffered by the French in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870, the debate about anthropogeography took on an even greater geographical and political dimension for French intellectuals. The Durkheim and Mauss families were themselves from Alsace, which bordering the river Rhine, had been conquered by the Prussian army, and lay at the centre of the conflict.

In what follows, I want to reveal how Mauss employed a rhetorical strategy to pin down his opposition. Febvre's critique is to some extent forgotten today, so that SV is now associated with a socially determined conception of seasonality and more

1 The original quotations are in French, the translation is mine.

generally speaking, temporality. It may therefore be surprising that the polemic was concerned with the subject of technology, and that the concept of seasonality in the 19th century enjoyed a long association with physical or *telluric* forces. Mauss's interpretation of seasonality as a social phenomenon was in fact a re-interpretation, a departure from the norm, and instrumental in making the case for social morphology.

Knowing that SV had an important polemical dimension should invite audiences to read the essay with greater attention to its claims, and to be sensitive to Mauss's techniques of marshalling evidence. The social and material facts of the dramatic changes in the way of life of Inuit between winter and summer landscapes provide Mauss with his primary evidence. The most salient evidential contexts for SV are twofold. First, there are the Inuit societies themselves, moving from a religiously, demographically, and spatially concentrated, intense life in winter, to a more fragmented, solitary, and dispersed life on the land in the summer. The evidence itself is not in dispute, but the two seasonal modes of life offer alternative bodies of evidence to draw on. Second, there are the competing interpretations of the social and material facts by rival European schools of political and social theory. For some years, writers had been debating whether Inuit societies are predominantly collectivists or individualists in ways which mirrored assumptions about European societies. At the risk of oversimplifying the views of many different writers, Inuit came to be seen more often than not by sociologists and anthropologists as religiously governed, social collectives, and by geographers as highly-skilled, pragmatic, individualists, constantly responding and adapting their techniques of hunting and travelling to their ever-changing surroundings[2].

While the fault lines of debates about hunter-gatherer social organisation in the late nineteenth century have yet to be mapped out properly, an analysis of SV may further illuminate the deep disciplinary division between the approaches of anthropologists and geographers to Inuit studies throughout the 20th century. What was at stake for Mauss and his collaborator Henri Beuchat[3] in how and where the boundaries between socio-religious and biophysical causes should be drawn? More recent scholarship cites SV in ways that contain a grain of truth, but are also misleading. Mary Douglas (1972: 513-514) has rightly called SV "an explicit attack on geographical or technological determinism in interpreting domestic organization." She goes on to say that this "demands an ecological approach in which the structure of ideas and of society, the mode of gaining a livelihood and the domestic architecture are interpreted as a single interacting whole in which no one element can be said to determine the others" (*ibid.*).

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2 In SV, Mauss uses the term "Eskimo" which was used generically to encompass Eskimoan peoples from Alaska to Greenland, while being attentive to differences in their social organisation and technologies. I have used the term "Inuit" throughout, but acknowledge that its usage draws attention to shared features of culture and language in ways that differ significantly from early 20th century associations.

3 In the original plan of writing the essay, Mauss's participation was to be secondary but he rapidly took over the work (Fournier 1994: 265). Furthermore, as indicated in the final footnote of the essay, "the writing and correction of this work belonging mainly to M. Mauss, M. Beuchat had no reponsibility to any errors it may contain" (Mauss 1909: 132, n. 5, my translation).

However, the idea of a single, interacting whole doesn't capture Mauss's ideas or the problem of reconciling physical and social causation with sufficient accuracy. SV was written between 1903 and 1906 on principles very different from those proposed by writers on ecology in the 1920s and later.

James Fox, the translator of SV into English, observed that Mauss attributed seasonal time to both physical factors (material substrate of the land) and social factors (social rhythms, rituals). Summarising the crux of his position, "because social life is dependent on its material substratum, Eskimo societies offer a special 'test case,' for 'at the very moment when the form of the group changes, one can observe the simultaneous transformation of religion, law and moral life'" (Fox in Mauss 1979: 10). Yet Fox like Douglas sees in Mauss "a remarkable first attempt to develop an ecological approach within which to consider a whole range of complex social phenomena" (*ibid.*: 12). But the references to holism and ecology, while looking forward to the emergence of ecology as a science in subsequent decades, should not obscure the philosophical fault lines of the controversy (Ratzel was more committed to a doctrine of holism than Durkheim and Mauss), and does little useful work in distinguishing between the protagonists' positions. As a point of departure, I propose to abandon reference to ecology and instead return to the organic categories of physiology and morphology of Mauss's contemporaries.

Background to the essay

After graduating from the lycée at Épinal in Alsace-Lorraine, Mauss (1872-1950) joined and studied under his uncle Émile Durkheim (1858-1917), 14 years his senior, at the University of Bordeaux. There, he studied a range of subjects including: religion, law and sociology, and prepared for his aggregation. He continued his study of religion in Paris at the École Pratique des Hautes Études in 1895. Mauss stayed on at the École and his uncle took a chair at the Sorbonne.

In 1902, Mauss began to prepare a series of lectures about Inuit societies, with the help of his student Henri Beuchat (1878-1914), an autodidact, with a background in museum and editorial work. Mauss also ran a seminar series where Beuchat contributed four lectures on Inuit migrations, social morphology and their technology (Fournier 1994: 301). SV was published in Durkheim's in-house journal, *L'Année Sociologique* in 1906. It belongs to the early part of Mauss's career, when he worked on religion, magic, and primitive classification.

Many book reviews were published in *L'Année Sociologique*. These reviews were sometimes simply tracking the literature by giving a summary of an author's work, and in other cases, engaged more directly in the arguments being proposed. At the turn of the 20th century, there were many schools of geography and anthropology, and Durkheim was working tirelessly to keep abreast of them all, while carving out a niche to develop his own sociology. *L'Année Sociologique* shows a number of instances besides SV where Durkheim's school was willing to engage with the concepts and

evidence of rival schools, without necessarily launching hostile attacks. One of those schools was Ratzel's anthropogeography. Ratzel (1844-1904) had by then become a famous figure in European circles of geography and ethnology. In his publication *Anthropogeographie*, Ratzel argued that societies were organisms in their own right. As such, they would naturally expand or contract as would an organism that grows and responds to its environment. Much taken with Thomas Malthus's prognosis that food supplies would always be under pressure from a more rapidly growing population, Ratzel envisaged a struggle between societies that would always need more resources than were available to them, a pressure that could ultimately be resolved only by emigration and colonialism. The Franco-Prussian War of 1870, in which Ratzel had fought and suffered wounds, demonstrated to his satisfaction the necessary desire of every European nation to extend its territory, but also the futility of this predicament without overseas colonial expansion as an outlet.

Given Ratzel's analysis of the organic imperatives underlying expansion and *Lebensraum* (German for 'habitat,' 'living space'), one may wonder why Durkheim and Mauss appear to have been so accommodating to his views. Indeed, he was invited to publish a summary of his ideas in *L'Année Sociologique* which was published in 1900. Durkheim even wrote in the same issue a book review of Ratzel's *Anthropogeographie*. Throughout the 1890s, Ratzel enjoyed an international reputation as one of the leading geographical authorities on questions of race and empire. He published widely on the subjects of travel, race and politics and had access to large, popular audiences. His richly documented *Völkerkunde* (1885-1888) with its carefully ordered displays of artifacts, provided his readers with a visual classification scheme for learning to see an ordered hierarchy amongst the native peoples of the world. Technological artifacts in European museums played an important role in his attempts to teach a visual method of learning. His methods for classifying peoples came from maintaining close links with the museum world, particularly in Berlin, where Felix von Luschan promoted the study of artifacts using anthropometrics and display methods appealing to visual analogies of evolution.

Why did Mauss choose to embark on his study of Inuit seasonality? His thinking about the fundamental categories of time and space can be traced back to the famous article on classification that he co-authored with Durkheim in 1903. In it, they concluded that ideas of time and space are, at each point in their history, closely connected with the corresponding social organisation (Durkheim and Mauss 1903). They argued that the links between ideas of time and space—like seasonality—and social organisation could be subjected to rigorous investigation, and not dismissed as self-evident. Thus Mauss (1979: 20) concludes that SV represents "the unique case [...] that has been systematically studied," "a well constructed experiment" that is sufficient to confirm the initial hypothesis and "demonstrate a law" of seasonality in social organisation and social morphology.

Critics have evaluated SV *prima facie*, as simply demonstrating that temporality, the collective experience of time, is a social phenomenon; and specifically, that Inuit experience summer and winter more clearly or vividly than any other society. Essays

on the social experience of time have since rightly cited SV as an important precedent (Evans-Pritchard 1940; Gell 1992; Harris 1988: 66). However, on a closer reading of SV, the phenomenon of seasonal variation is not simply reducible to the social experience of time. It is incorrect therefore to attribute to Mauss the belief that seasonality is socially determined; that would misinterpret his project and polemical engagement with anthropogeography. At the heart of SV, Mauss was seeking to link the social and biophysical dimensions of seasonality. In order to carve out a new intellectual space for seasonality in sociology, he sought to "distinguish social causes from others of a limited and purely physical nature" (Mauss 1979: 53), but not to eliminate the explanatory power of biophysical causes. This is clearly stated in the opening chapter on "General Morphology" where Mauss writes, "we must look to the Eskimo way of life for the causes of this situation [seasonal dimorphism][...]. It is [...] a remarkable application of the laws of biophysics and of the necessary symbiotic relations among animals species" (*ibid.*: 32).

The action of biophysical causes on Inuit social morphology in SV is indirect. Technologies and biology play a mediating role in the causal chain. They show "how it happens that the Eskimo assemble in winter and disperse in summer" (*ibid.*: 56) and "the time of year when these movements of concentration and dispersion occur, their duration and succession, and their marked opposition to one another" (*ibid.*: 56). This adds weight to Mauss's claim in the chapter on "General Morphology" that Inuit are "governed by environmental circumstances"[4] .

Mauss goes on to argue that the biophysical causes are "insufficient to account for the total phenomenon" (*ibid.*) because they don't explain "why this concentration and dispersion attains that degree of intimacy which [...] the rest of the study will confirm" (*ibid.*). This is where social morphology (general morphology encompasses biophysical and social morphology) takes on great importance. From my reading it follows that the social phenomena that characterise seasonality (religious rituals, laws, etc.) are effects, not causes, and Mauss is explicit about this: "Now that we have [...] established some of their causes, we must study their effects, [...] the way in which these variations affect both the religious and legal life of the group" (*ibid.*: 57). The title of Mauss's longest and most important chapter about social morphology in the original French version is simply "Les Effets." Mauss is clearly no social determinist, and he doesn't perceive the classification of social morphology as a set of effects as being detrimental to their status or importance. Before considering how technologies mediate between the different kinds of causes, some further background about the polemic against anthropogeography is required.

War by proxy: Mauss and Steensby

Hans-Peder Steensby (1875-1920) was an intellectual disciple of Friedrich Ratzel. He grew up in the Danish provincial town of Odense, and moved to Copenhagen

4 In the original French edition, Mauss (1906) uses the phrase "circonstances ambiantes" which has less ambiguity than the term "environment."

University in 1894 to study natural history and geography. In his doctoral studies, he acquired laboratory training with Ernst Løffler, a physical geographer specialising in vulcanology, and was exposed to the importance of travel and fieldwork. Steensby chose for his Ph.D. research to study the origins of Inuit societies. Lacking home grown expertise in this area of human geography, Steensby visited museums and universities abroad, tapping into international networks. Most important for his intellectual formation was his time spent in 1901 at the Museum für Völkerkunde in Berlin. There, he studied physical anthropology; learned laboratory techniques from Felix von Luschan; and read ethnography, travel accounts, and geography with Ferdinand von Richthofen. For the rest of his career, he adopted this array of field-based tools and techniques. Working within a framework of anthropogeography, Steensby spent the next 15 years reconstructing Inuit "industrial culture" as a basis for speculating about their migrations and adaptations (Bravo 2002: 242-248).

To understand Mauss's strategy I now shall turn to his treatment of the domestic social sphere of winter houses. This topic had already been written on extensively by Steensby, who as a practitioner of Ratzel's theory and methods, served Mauss as an intellectual proxy or target for a critique of Ratzel. The strategy of Mauss, was to draw selectively on the evidence used by Steensby, but to reorient the interpretive evidential context from anthropogeography to social morphology.

Mauss chose his battleground for the essay with care. One can fairly speculate that he sought to avoid a direct comparison of French and German attitudes to expansion, a delicate topic especially as both parties had close ties to the Alsace region. Since their theorising was in principle suited as well to one society as another, Mauss elected to focus his arguments around a model of Inuit society that more closely mirrored his understanding of the French Republic, having strong collectivist values, and demonstrating an enduring social stability. The poignant question about Inuit society, put bluntly, was this: are they at heart social Darwinists, a group of individuals, competing for finite resources, and expanding the extent of their geographical space in order to meet this need (anthropogeographers' view)? Or are the Inuit fundamentally a collective, living in harmony and in response to the animals, with their need for spatial expansion (in summer) and contraction (in winter), but never actually growing from year to year, as Mauss would have it?

In SV, Mauss lays the turf for his polemic by carefully positioning himself in relation to Ratzel and his followers. He is planning to criticise the anthropogeographers, while being careful not to dismiss them or antagonise them excessively. In a conciliatory but precise tone, he asserts that he is interested in "facts [...] of the same sort" as the anthropogeographers, but takes a different theoretical approach. Diplomatically he acknowledges "the positive discoveries or the fruitful suggestions which we owe to this brilliant array of researchers" (Mauss 1979: 20). Anthropogeographers, he notes, study "the distribution of men on the surface of the earth and the material form of societies" (*ibid.*), hinting that their methods are positivist, concerned primarily with spatial patterns.

In distancing his own position, Mauss asserts that he will not "make the mistake of considering [societies] as if they were independent of their territorial base" (*ibid.*: 21). This was hardly a fair reading of either Ratzel's position since his anthropogeography arose out of a concern to understand processes of human adaptation to changing physical demands in industrial cultures. Portraying Ratzel's position in this light enabled Mauss to look much more reasonable and thereby to occupy the middle ground. Being "specialists in geography [...] [anthropogeographers] have attributed an almost exclusive preponderance to geographical factors. Instead of investigating all aspects of the material substratum of societies, they have concentrated their attention first and foremost on the factor of the land" (*ibid.*). It is important to note however that in his original text Mauss used the term *facteur tellurique* and not *facteur géographique*. He thereby overemphasised the causal significance of the geophysical forces of the earth, and narrowed the anthropogeographers' position. He then asserted that land "constitutes only one of the conditions for the material form of human groups," and that there are in fact "thousands of other factors from which it is inseparable." Mauss's key point is that the economic and material basis of a society is socially complex and cannot legitimately be reduced to geophysical forces: "for men to gather together, instead of living in a dispersed fashion, it is insufficient simply to assert that the climate or a configuration of the land draws them together; their moral, legal, and religious organization must also allow a concentrated way of life" (*ibid.*). In a word, the causal efficacy of geophysical forces "must be considered in relation to a social context in all its complex totality" (*ibid.*).

In a few sentences, Mauss criticises the methodology of anthropogeography for not being up to the task of explaining the complex social totality: "All these questions are not, therefore, geographical questions but proper sociological ones" (Mauss 1979: 22). He next asserts his preference for "social morphology" over "anthropogeography." Aware that his position may be misunderstood or criticised as little more than "a frivolous taste for neologisms," he emphasises that "these different labels define a difference in orientation" (*ibid.*). Thus in the introduction to the essay, the battle lines of the polemic are drawn.

Next, Mauss introduces the most relevant literature of the anthropogeographers. He acknowledges that Steensby (1905) is the only one to have paid attention to seasonal variations in Inuit society, but dismisses his work as being "incidental and fragmentary" (*ibid.*: 22). Although Mauss had been reading studies about Inuit with his students as early as 1903, his analysis hinges on Hans-Peder Steensby' doctoral dissertation which was only completed and published in 1905. This was Steensby's first publication, and so soon after its completion, it seems to have been a little known quantity[5]. Hence when Mauss attributes Steensby's sole concern with the "exclusive action of the land factor" on his youthful inexperience, "perhaps not surprising in a student dissertation" (*ibid.*), readers ought to recognise that Mauss was being glibly condescending The fact is that Steensby was the first student in Denmark to take up the

5 As Beuchat taught seminars on technology, it seems plausible that he drew Mauss's attention to Steensby's work, although in the summer of 1905, Mauss went to England to read texts that Beuchat had not found in Paris (Fournier 1994: 265).

study of anthropogeography and his intellectual debts to Ratzel and von Luschan were clearly marked throughout his work.

Although Mauss acknowledges Steensby's research on the unity and origins of Eskimoan cultures, he rejects the use of Steensby's spatial framework of technologies on the grounds that speculating on Inuit origins is the wrong type of explanation. Mauss comments that "these [origins], the author thinks he can find elsewhere than among the Eskimos themselves (referring to the inland Athapaskans), though he has little evidence to support his thesis" (*ibid.*: 44). Steensby (1917: 53-54) in fact credited the inspiration for his thesis of an abrupt change in Inuit material culture to the earlier work of Heinrich Rink (1875). As an explanation of Inuit cultural change, Rink was "inclined to favour the idea of expulsion from the interior by a hostile tribe," down a river draining to the Arctic coast where the inland birch bark canoe had been gradually modified using sealskin to create the kayak, "the kernel of the Eskimo culture in implements." Once established, the kayak "had by degrees to drag all the others [implements] after it (Steensby 1917: 55)." Contrary to Mauss's criticism, Steensby reasoned that the "essential impulse" for the development of Paleoeskimo culture "did not come until the Eskimo had accustomed themselves to stay at or on the sea ice in the winter and hunt seals" in the Coronation Gulf area (*ibid.*: 205). Mauss also omitted to mention that most scholars of Inuit studies at that time were engaged in speculating about Inuit migration and adaptation as a form of evolutionary response to changing physical conditions. Where Steensby departed from Rink was in his ranking of evidence, placing greater store on the evidence from Inuit dwellings than kayaks, language, and folklore (Steensby 1905: 142-146).

Mauss's strategy in discrediting anthropogeography involves three steps. First, he selectively appropriates the evidence of the design and distribution of winter dwellings deemed most relevant by Steensby. Although Steensby had not yet undertaken any Arctic fieldwork, in his comparative study of the architecture of Indian and Inuit dwellings he had made a thorough reading of existing travel literature and ethnography[6].

Second, Mauss (1979: 54) attacks Steensby's argument that the origins of Inuit seasonality lie in an "Indian type of culture whose closest approximation can still be observed among the Eskimo during the summer." Mauss points to the lack of contemporary or historical evidence of any Inuit hunting culture wholly reliant on summer technologies: "Nowhere do we find a single trace of any Eskimo group whose principal occupation was hunting and whose only dwelling was the tent. From the moment that the Eskimo appear as a specific social group, they already have their well-established two-fold culture (*ibid.*)." Mauss identifies the absence of contemporary evidence for a year-round summer Inuit culture as a fatal flaw in Steensby's argument

6 Steensby did anthropogeographical fieldwork in subsequent years and published widely for international specialist audiences, before his life was tragically cut short by drowning during a trans-Atlantic crossing in 1920 (Bravo 2002).

for gradual change through technological adaptation. Mauss concludes that the causes of Inuit seasonal dimorphism must be located within Inuit society itself.

Third, he shifts the context of the winter and summer dwellings from anthropogeography over to the framework of social morphology. Whereas Steensby considers winter houses as a key adaptive response to changing physical conditions, Mauss dismisses this type of explanation for technologies as simplistic, and sees in them instead a material architecture that embodies their fundamental social unity. Winter houses, claims Mauss, reveal the unchanging essence of Inuit societies, the periodic repetition of the dense social formation that gives rise to a state of "continuous religious exaltation" (*ibid.*: 57) in contrast to the summer where it seemed to him that "there is no religion" (*ibid.*). In Mauss's view, Steensby was methodologically ill equipped to understand either the heightened social consciousness or the laws of social organisation embodied in the design of technologies like the winter houses.

In Mauss's account, because social morphology is expressed as a set of seasonally differentiated effects, they should be understood as evidence of contingency and not determinism. In his concluding chapter, he elaborates on the nature of this contingency: "social life in all its forms—moral, religious, and legal—is dependent on its material substratum and that it varies with this substratum, namely with the mass, density, form, and composition of human groups" (*ibid.*: 80). If the material milieu is in its totality a necessary condition for the existence of the social life, its component factors are not assigned equal weight as causes. (By analogy if a person is engaged in a ball game, the existence of the ball is a necessary condition, but is not normally considered the cause of it being thrown or hit.) Likewise according to Mauss, the material substratum is a complex set of necessary conditions for Inuit social life.

If all causes, biophysical or social, vary seasonally, what is the ontological status of seasonality? Mauss understands seasonality in its essence to be forces acting in concert together. In the biophysical realm, the components of the seasons behave dynamically and are governed by the laws of meteorology, physics, physiology, etc. In the social realm, dynamic relations are in their essence linked by principles like coordination, rhythm, and mobility, that enable the people to plan their movements in a way that is harmonious with the seasonality of the animals on which their spiritual and material lives depend. Mauss states this clearly:

> A veritable phenomenon of symbiosis [...] forces the group to live like the animals they hunt. These animals concentrate and disperse according to the seasons [...]. This alternation provides the rhythm of concentration and dispersion for the morphological organization of Eskimo society. The population congregates or scatters like the game. The movement that animates Eskimo society is synchronized with that of the surrounding life (Mauss 1979: 55-56).

The term "symbiosis" is striking. It is a principle of classification, a primary social cause, that explains and unites the distinct winter and summer social morphologies. In Mauss's view, symbiosis is the primary technique of Inuit society, the essential

principle of classification. The key to Mauss's essay is that he has redefined seasonality in terms of symbiotic mobility. The social effects are synchronous responses to the many physical and social causes. A synchronic temporality does not do away with causation, but it does mean that symbiosis with the animals makes long term variations in physical causes of secondary importance. This interpretation of causation is more like Hume's, based on custom, formed through the repetition of past experiences, and not by *a priori* reasoning. Hume famously argued that "the constant conjunction of two objects" leads us to "expect one from the appearance of the other" (Morris 2001).

Technology in the works of Durkheim and Mauss

SV represents Mauss's first serious writing on the subject of techniques and technology. In describing symbiosis as the "essential technique" of Inuit societies, he also claims that it is a "social phenomenon," although he does not develop this idea further as a critique of theories of technology in SV. This may be because Durkheim and Mauss perceived technology to be a more useful explanatory resource to their anthropogeographical rivals than to their own cause. Ratzel's *Anthropogeographie* (1882-1891) and *Politische Geographie* (1897) offered an engaging, popular, and controversial account of the forces of industrial expansion that both legitimated colonial expansion and spoke to challenges to the stability of the nations of Europe. His books argued for an account of technology both as an index of the development of peoples and as an evolutionary explanation of social evolution. He argued that technologies were a means by which societies could grow or contract (*e.g.*, industrialisation, militarisation) and could be understood as a form of organic adaptation by a people to its changing needs for resources and space. Ratzel's worldview blended anti-Semitic, nationalist, and evolutionary ideas; he promoted these same themes energetically and tirelessly. For Durkheim and Mauss, it was by contrast imperative to offer an account of hunter-gatherer societies predicated on stability rather than growth, harmony with territory rather than conflict, and the power of collective obligations rather than competitive individualism.

Schlanger (2006) observes that prior to the First World War, the Durkheim school had little to say about technology. As early as 1901, Durkheim introduced into *L'Année Sociologique* a section on *Technologie*; and included a very brief essay about it by Henri Hubert (1903) in *L'Année Sociologique*. These exceptions aside, Durkheim declined to use the theme of technology as a means to explore social-material relations, instead relegating technology in effect to a footnote. Schlanger (2006: 10) refers to this as one of Durkheim's disengagements from technology. Schlanger rightly argues that Mauss's commitment to writing about contemporary politics—including technology—represented a genuine divergence from Durkheim. My analysis reveals SV to be a privileged case study of the role of technologies in mediating physical and social causal chains through social and material relations. In particular the winter and summer houses are the means by which the Inuit are able to maintain their symbiotic relationship with the animal world through the alternating social morphologies associated with the seasons. This is an explicit critique of the theory of technology as a

cultural adaptive mechanism in Steensby and Ratzel. Moreover, by arguing that symbiosis is in itself a privileged technique that belongs to the social world, Mauss at least hints at the possibility of a social theory of techniques.

Conclusion

Mauss's essay was seeking to contain rather than eliminate the causal power of the geophysical forces of the earth that had for at least a century been a foundation of the world systems constructed by scientific travellers and geographers as diverse as Alexander von Humboldt and Friedrich Ratzel. In limiting the role of telluric forces, Mauss was attempting to reposition the material substratum as something broader than geophysics, with complex and intimate connections to the social world. While criticising anthropogeography, Mauss limited the physical phenomenon of seasonality to a signal indicating a time of profound social change. The seasons in that sense were not a sociological discovery so much as an obstacle to advances in sociology; they could not explain the intensity of Inuit religious life in winter or the content of that religious life.

Like his opponents from Ratzel's school, Mauss accepted that architecture—specifically winter technologies of habitation—provided the crucial evidence for seasonality. Unlike his opponents, Mauss read into Inuit winter architecture evidence of a stable (even static) dense social morphology and religious life, whereas the anthropogeographer Steensby saw in the winter habitations and technology evidences of individual skill, design, and inventiveness, enabling adaptation and territorial expansion north into the harsher physical conditions of the Arctic archipelago.

Mauss recognised amongst the causes of Inuit social life two key classificatory categories of temporality—symbiosis and synchronicity—as fundamental to the content of Inuit life. These acts of classification are also causal because they structure the response of Inuit to the biophysical seasonal causes. They create their social effects indirectly, mediated by the contrasting material tools and techniques of summer and winter. In other words, the account of temporality proposed in SV is one in which time is experienced as a radically changing religious intensity in the community of human beings as well as with animals. This experience is mediated or shaped by winter technologies of social organisation, pre-eminently the architecture of the winter house. The migration patterns of the animals, and the concentration of seals around the ice floe edge in winter, are proposed as the key biophysical causes which produce their social effects on human societies indirectly through a symbiosis mediated by technologies.

The cost of misreading Mauss has been considerable, particularly the tendency to credit him with a crude social determinism because it misrepresents his understanding of the contingency of social life on the material substratum, fails to understand his interpretation of causation, and overlooks his recognition of the fundamental importance of symbiosis. Suggestions that Mauss was a holist championing a unity of nature and society requires considerable qualification in the light of this analysis. After

all, he argued emphatically that social causes are of a different kind to biophysical causes. In the wider quest by anthropologists and geographers to reintegrate accounts of the social and material worlds, the essay is a fascinating intervention in the process of bringing the subjects of temporality and techniques into the social domain. In drawing a distinction between seasons (experience of change in the annual cycle of weather) and seasonality (seasonal synchronicity [with the animals]), Mauss argued against unmediated determinism. Clearly much was left unsaid, but this can be read as an invitation to readers and fellow scholars to develop the sociological argument further.

As students of Inuit studies, it is thought-provoking to reflect on the disciplinary legacy of SV and the relationship between geography and anthropology. For disciplines that to some extent share common concerns and domains, the lack of dialogue and engagement is regrettable. My analysis of SV enables us to see this text in a new light an early study in the sociology of knowledge. Inuit studies has to some extent inherited a grand divide between studies dedicated to the religious and collective (*e.g.*, shamanism, kinship, etc.) and those dedicated to the study of the skilled practice of individuals (*e.g.*, navigation, toponymy, astronomy, ethnoscience). At the heart of the division is an unresolved conflict that Mauss and his contemporaries confronted: to understand how the very different kinds of power inherent in social and material forces can be harnessed to live harmoniously. This represents in my view a challenge to us all to rethink the relationship between two paradigms of Inuit studies that often exist in parallel, and to discover through ethnography a better integrated account of the social, the material, and the physical.

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